Intern 113

Chapter 113

Meanwhile…

Harper flopped belly-first onto the plush bed in Maya's suite, limbs splayed like a dramatic starfish.

"All right, spill. You sounded like a lost puppy on the phone-and I was in the middle of my sacred beauty ritual, so this better be worth the emergency call. Don't even think about denying it."

Maya sat at the foot of the bed, hugging a throw pillow to her chest.

"I'm not denying anything," she muttered. "I'm just… confused."

Harper turned her head. "About what? The way your body short-circuits when he's near? Or the fact that his arm around your waist looked like it belonged there?"

Maya's face flushed hot. "Harper-"

"I'm just saying," Harper sing-songed, "it was hot. Like, dangerously hot. Like, I need sunscreen just from witnessing it."

Maya groaned and flopped backward beside her.

“I don’t know what I’m doing,” she admitted, echoing Damien’s earlier words-unknowingly mirroring him.

Harper tilted her head. “Well, have you ever been in love?”

Maya shook her head. “No.”

“Been with anyone?”

She hesitated. “No.”

Harper blinked. “Like… no no?”

Maya nodded, cheeks burning. “No.”

“Oh,” Harper breathed. Then softened immediately. “Okay. That explains a lot.”

Maya sat up, arms crossed. “What’s that supposed to mean?”

Harper grinned and booped her on the nose. “That means I’m officially your Yoda. But make it sexy. And confident.”

Harper’s voice grew gentler.

“Listen. You don’t have to figure it all out right away. But if you like him-really like him-you’re allowed to feel it. You’re allowed to want it. That doesn’t make you weak. That makes you

brave.”

Maya blinked. Her throat tightened.

“You think I’m brave?”

Harper nudged Maya’s shoulder gently. “Brave doesn’t even begin to cover it. You’re juggling three lives and being a single parent to Jamie. You’re not just brave, you’re the strongest woman I know. And-” she paused, eyes softening, “you’re facing things that scare you. Including your own heart.”

Maya’s eyes stung, the pressure behind them building too fast to blink away.

She dropped her gaze, voice barely above a whisper.

“I’m scared, Harper. Scared that if I listen to my heart, people will judge me. They’ll call me a gold digger, say I’m using him, or worse.”

Her throat tightened.

“I don’t want that. I don’t want chaos. Or whispers. Or hate.” Her fingers twisted the hem of her dress, voice trembling.

“I’ve always stayed in my lane. It felt safer. Simpler. I think… I got so used to surviving, I forgot I was allowed to want more.”

She looked up, eyes glassy.

“But now… everything feels too big to ignore. And I don’t know if I’m strong enough to step out of the quiet.”

Harper didn’t speak right away. She just reached out and pulled Maya into a hug-tight, warm, the kind that didn’t need words to say you’re safe here.

After a long moment, she leaned back just enough to look at her.

“You are strong enough,” she said softly. “You’ve been strong all your life. But strength doesn’t always mean staying quiet or small. Sometimes it means letting yourself want something. Letting yourself be seen.”

She smiled, brushing a tear from Maya’s cheek with her thumb.

“And screw anyone who dares to judge you. They don’t know your heart. They don’t know how hard you’ve fought just to breathe.”

Maya let out a shaky laugh through the tears.

Harper’s tone shifted, just a little.

“You know, I used to think love was supposed to be tidy. You meet, you flirt, you match *********: aesthetics… and then poof, happily ever after.”

Maya tilted her head. “And?”

Harper grinned.

“And I dated a guy who made me laugh and paid for my bubble tea, but when I needed real support? Crickets.”